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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0936

INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2133

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9167

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7412

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5284

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3565

RUEHNW/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5215

RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0083

RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0750

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4332

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9727

RUEHBFI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 7018

RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0071

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3887

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001118

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/04/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [FAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTION SEASON MAY BRING INCREASED RISK TO JOURNALISTS

REF: COLOMBO 993

COLOMBO 00001118 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VALERIE C. FOWLER. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)  
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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Sunday Leader newspaper editor-in-chief Frederica Jansz, and chairman of Leader Publications Lal Wickramatunge reported feeling increasingly at risk as election season took off and expected that conditions would worsen after presidential nominations on December 17. The pair were advised by someone inside the intelligence agency to be very careful and that their phones were monitored. Jansz and Wickramatunge asked that the diplomatic community raise journalists' freedom and personal security during the campaigns in bilateral meetings. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) In a December 3 meeting with representatives of several diplomatic missions, Jansz and Wickramatunge reported that they were feeling increasingly at risk as elections approached and requested that the diplomatic community raise the safety of journalists in bilateral meetings. Jansz and Wickramatunge reported that a contact inside the Sri Lankan intelligence agency recently advised them that they should take extra precautions and that their phones were being monitored. They believed the risk would increase significantly as of December 17, when nominations were made and campaigns intensified. The pair also reported that President Rajapaksa had said that he himself had no problem with their work but that he could not control the actions of his brother, Gotabhaya, the Secretary of Defense. They saw this as a poor excuse.

¶3. (C) The international non-governmental organization Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) was working with the pair to create a risk-reduction strategy. Ideas included NP staff accompanying them to/from work, making drop-in visits to the office to demonstrate that the international community was

aware of them, providing longer-term presence during high-risk periods, and security training for all Sunday Leader staff. NP would begin its involvement now and build up its presence as the 17th drew closer. They were also looking into ways to better protect their office premises, such as barbed wire, security cameras, and guards. Wickramatunge was particularly concerned about the printing facilities, which were burned down twice in the past.

**¶4. (C)** The Sunday Leader has long been targeted with threats and violence. Jansz and Munza Mushataq, News Editor, received death threats by mail on October 22, 2009 (reftel). The paper's founder and former editor-in-chief Lasantha Wickramatunge (brother of Lal) was murdered in January 2009, three weeks after receiving a similar threat. Handwriting analysis commissioned by the paper indicated that all three letters were probably written by the same person.

**¶5. (C) COMMENT:** Jansz and Wickramatunge appeared visibly frightened. As the elections draw near and campaigning escalates, journalists may face increasingly grave risk to their personal security and facilities. On the other hand, it is also possible that the intelligence "leak" to the pair about their increased risk was done purposefully to increase their stress level. In either case, the aim would be to force the Sunday Leader to tone down its critical editorial policy. Thus far, the Sunday Leader has courageously continued to print the news as it sees fit but self-censorship in the face of threats is an understandable human reaction. Embassy will look for opportunities to raise the case of the Sunday Leader, as well as that of Tissainayagam, including during Assistant Secretary Blake's upcoming visit. END COMMENT.

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